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ABSTRACT

This booklet, part of the Education Policy Institute series about teacher union issues, clarifies the concept of parent involvement in educational reform, analyzing the treatment of parents in collective bargaining contracts between teacher unions and school boards and in union policy resolutions. Chapter 1 introduces the issue, offering an overview of the National Education Association (NEA) and American Federation of Teachers (AFT). Chapter 2 presents NEA/AFT policies related to parents, discussing NEA resolutions, AFT resolutions, parents in NEA's legislative agenda, NEA publications, and AFT publications. Overall, all NEA AFT materials on parent involvement define it in ways that strengthen or do not challenge teacher and union roles in education. Chapter 3 discusses how parents are treated in teacher bargaining and teacher union contracts with school districts, including actual union proposals and articles excerpted from teacher union/school district contracts. Chapter 4 reviews teacher union relations with the National PTA and its state and local affiliates. These relations help explain how collective bargaining affects parent involvement. Chapter 5 summarizes the issue, noting the huge gap between union rhetoric and union practice regarding parent involvement. The rhetoric praises and urges involvement, while the practice discourages it. The NEA and AFT use parent involvement more to support union policy and legislative objectives than to help children learn. (Contains 44 endnotes.) (SM)

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Teacher Unions and Parent Involvement

Charlene K. Haar

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EPI Series on Teacher Unions

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- Teacher Unions and Parent Involvement

Teacher Unions and Parent Involvement

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Foreword

Although everyone urges more "parent involvement," there is no consensus on what it means. Like many other terms in the debates over education reform, "parent involvement" means different things to different parties in the debates.

For this reason, the Education Policy Institute is pleased to publish Charlene K. Haar's pioneering analysis and clarification of this important concept. She has deepened our understanding partly by analyzing the treatment of parents in collective bargaining contracts between teacher unions and school boards, also in NEA/AFT policy resolutions. As Ms. Haar points out, the phrase has been coopted by the education establishment to denote support for what teachers do, or for the legislative agendas of the education establishment. Clearly, however, parents who object to practices in the schools, or to the legislative agendas of educational organizations are "involved".

Hopefully, Ms. Haar's analysis will point the way to a concept of parent involvement that includes the activities of all parents who are involved in helping their children learn.

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The Education Policy Institute will normally approve requests to publish and disseminate this publication in whole or in part, provided appropriate credit is accorded the Education Policy Institute and Ms. Haar. Criticisms, suggestions, and inquiries about it (or any other EPI publication) are welcome and may be addressed to either Ms. Haar or myself at:

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Chapter 1
Introduction

Everyone agrees that for better or worse, parent involvement plays an extremely important role in the education of their children. Hardly a week goes by without another article encouraging "parent involvement" or citing the benefits of having parents participate in their children's education. Education and government leaders, teachers, and educational organizations all advocate parent involvement as a way to raise the level of student achievement. Clearly, many parents help their children succeed in school, and many more would do so if they believed that they could help their children learn more.

Parent involvement, however, does not happen in a vacuum. It is affected by many factors, such as school district encouragement (or discouragement) of it. This report is devoted to one of the most important factors, the teacher union impact on parent involvement. The union role is especially important because it is the most reliable guide to teacher attitudes toward parent involvement. These matters require an examination of the concept of "parent involvement", and how the teacher unions interpret and apply it at the school and school district level.

The analysis proceeds as follows: the rest of this chapter provides a brief overview of the National Education Association (NEA) and American Federation of Teachers (AFT); references to "the teacher unions" in this report refer to the NEA and AFT and their state and local affiliates. (Readers who are knowledgeable about NEA/AFT structure and operations may prefer to turn to Chapter 2 immediately.) Chapter 2 is a summary of NEA/AFT policies and publications relating to parents and parent involvement. Because union policies may not be reflected in union practice, Chapter 3 is a discussion of how parents are treated in teacher bargaining and teacher union contracts with school districts. To ensure a realistic analysis of these matters, Chapter 3 includes actual union proposals and articles excerpted from teacher union/school district contracts. This discussion leads to Chap-

ter 4, which reviews teacher union relations with the National PTA and its state and local affiliates. These relations help to explain how collective bargaining affects parent involvement and set the stage for the summary and conclusions in Chapter 5.

The NEA and AFT: An Overview

The term "union" denotes an organization that represents or seeks to represent employees on terms and conditions of employment. As so defined, there are several teacher unions in the United States, including some that object to being labeled as "unions" even though they carry out some of the functions of unions. In any event, the NEA and AFT are the nation's largest, wealthiest, and most influential teacher unions, and this report is confined to their relationships with parents.

National Education Association (NEA)

The NEA is by far the nation's largest teacher union.

The NEA is by far the nation's largest teacher union. It enrolled over 2.3 million members in 1997-98; about 1.7 million were regular classroom teachers, and the others were retirees, students, life members, education support personnel (cafeteria workers, janitors, bus drivers and others), and college and university professors. Active regular members must join at the state and local levels as well as the national level. Dues in this unified structure range from $300 to $700 each year.

To put it mildly, the NEA is a very affluent union. Its total 1998-99 national budget was about $220 million. This amount does not include the revenues of its state and local affiliates, or the revenues of its PAC funds, foundations, and other special purpose organizations.

Politically, the NEA is one of our most influential organizations at all levels of government. About one of every nine delegates to the Democratic convention that nominated the Clinton/Gore ticket in 1992 and 1996 was a member of the NEA or AFT; the large majority were NEA members. In most states, the NEA's state affiliates are among the two or

three most influential organizations in the state legislatures. In addition, the NEA's local affiliates actively solicit and support school board candidates. All things considered, the NEA and its affiliates are influential organizations at every level of government.[1]

American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO (AFT)

The AFT is a member of the American Federation of Labor - Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), a confederation of 72 national and international unions. The AFT is active in only 45 states, including several in which it is only a minor presence. The federation is concentrated in large urban districts, especially in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states. About one-third of AFT's total membership is from New York state; about one-ninth from New York City.

The AFT has five categories of membership:

1. Regular classroom teachers
2. Support personnel
3. Higher education personnel
4. Health care workers
5. State and local government employees

About one-third of AFT's total membership is from New York state.

Although AFT membership in 1998 was about 950,000, only about 600,000 were regular classroom teachers. Both the NEA and the AFT enroll over 100,000 retirees and utilize them effectively in political campaigns. Like the NEA, the AFT overwhelmingly supports Democratic party candidates. The AFT's political efforts are coordinated with the AFL-CIO's, which also overwhelmingly supports Democratic party candidates.

In 1997-98, AFT budgeted revenues at the national level were approximately $88 million;[2] its state and local revenues were estimated to be about $165 million, not counting its PAC, foundations, and other special purpose organizations.[3]

Although NEA and AFT policies, especially on educational issues, are remarkably similar if not identical, the structural differences between the two unions are significant:

- The NEA has term limits for its officers; the AFT does not.
- The NEA uses the secret ballot at its national convention; the AFT relies on secret ballots for electing delegates to its national convention, but voting at the AFT's national convention is not by secret ballot.
- The NEA has racial quotas throughout its governance structure; the AFT has none.
- The NEA does not allow delegates to its national convention to carry the votes of others; one body can cast only one vote. In contrast, the AFT allows individual delegates to cast the number of votes to which their local union is entitled.

Despite these and other differences, NEA and AFT policies are remarkably similar. Both unions have an extremely broad social agenda which is one reason why both overwhelmingly support Democratic candidates for office. Both unions support a nationalized system of health care, complete reproductive freedom for women, more federal aid for education, increased appropriation for health care, and all out opposition to education vouchers, tuition tax credits, and other forms of privatization.

The NEA and AFT...have an extremely broad social agenda.

Since 1995, the NEA and AFT have been negotiating on a merger agreement between the two unions. These negotiations culminated in 1998 on the Principles of Unity, an agreement on the basis of merger and the steps leading to its implementation. However, at its 1998 annual convention in New Orleans, the NEA's Representative Assembly (RA), the NEA's highest policymaking body, rejected the Principles of Unity by a 58 to 42 percent margin. Two weeks later, the AFT's biennial convention delegates overwhelmingly approved the Principles of Unity as a symbolic gesture. Subsequently, however, both the NEA and AFT approved the merger of their state affiliates in Minnesota, although the NEA emphasized that it would not necessarily approve additional mergers on the same basis.

Many NEA delegates who voted against the Principles of Unity nevertheless asserted that they supported merger.

Chapter 2
NEA/AFT Policies Relating to Parents

Rather surprisingly, very few national union articles refer explicitly to parents. To be sure, some NEA/AFT policies that do not explicitly refer to parents may have significant effects on them, but, clearly, parents are a peripheral concern in NEA/AFT policy. In fact, as the following policies show, not one is based on the idea that parents have a unique interest in school affairs.

NEA Resolutions

According to *The NEA Handbook*, its resolutions are formal expressions of belief or positions which support the goals of the union. The NEA's Representative Assembly (RA) is the highest level of authority and policy making in the NEA. Local and state affiliates send delegates to the RA which meets annually at various cities in the country. The NEA characterizes the Representative Assembly as the world's largest democratic, deliberative body. In recent years, almost 10,000 delegates have attended the annual RA, and among dozens of new business items and over 300 resolutions, delegates passed the following NEA resolutions that explicitly refer to parents.

Not one [NEA/AFT policy] is based on the idea that parents have a unique interest in school affairs.

A-2. Education Opportunity for All.

The National Education Association believes that each student has the right to a free public education which should be suited to the needs of the individual and guaranteed by state constitutions and the United States Constitution.(* See page 25.) Education is a lifelong process, and public schools serve a constituency that embraces all age groups. Access and opportunities for post secondary education should be widely available, and no qualified student should be denied such opportunities because of the cost of tuition and fees.

The Association also believes that all schools must

For this reason, future meetings of the RA may approve an NEA/AFT merger, albeit on a different basis than was set forth in the Principles of Unity. It is very unlikely, however, that any such merger would affect union policies on teacher union/parent relations. Even without merger, however, the NEA and the AFT enroll about three-fourths of all K-12 public school classroom teachers in the United States.

The NEA and the AFT enroll about three-fourths of all K-12 public school classroom teachers in the United States.

Almost 90 percent of America's 52.7 million elementary and secondary children are enrolled in public schools. NEA/AFT affiliates represent teachers in schools where most of these children go to school. For this reason, the policies of the teacher unions relating to parents are a matter of widespread interest and are the subject of the next chapter.

be accredited under uniform standards established by the appropriate agencies in collaboration with the Association and its affiliates and that the accreditation process must provide sufficient flexibility to enable individual schools to respond to the needs of their students and community. The development of a periodic review of locally established programs should involve community members, parents, students, teachers, and educational support personnel. The Association further believes that individuals, at their expense should be free to choose, to supplement, or to substitute education in privately supported, nonsegregated, nonpublic schools.

The Association further believes tax-exempt status should be denied to those institutions whose policies and/or practices prevent the integration of the institutions.[4]

A-3. Understanding and Support of Public Education.

The National Education Association recognizes its responsibility to promote understanding and support of public education and public education employees and to encourage wide community and parental participation in achieving and maintaining educational excellence. The Association believes that school boards have a responsibility to promote public understanding of the importance of the public schools.

The Association also believes that the success of our nation depends upon high standards of educational excellence. The Association supports high standards for student behavior and achievement, excellence in teaching, a positive school environment, and high parental expectations for both their children and the schools. The Association also recognizes its responsibility to publicize adverse educational conditions and to support efforts to improve such conditions.[5]

Resolution A-3 receives indirect support from the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the accrediting agency for programs in teacher

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education. The NEA and AFT contribute to and also have representation on the NCATE governing board. At its October 1996 meeting, the NCATE Standards Committee considered a proposal to add a parent involvement standard to its teacher education component, recognizing "that prospective teachers need to develop skills for the effective integration of parental involvement into schooling."[6] Beginning in 1999, the following "Field Experiences" component will become part of an accreditation standard: "Field experiences, student teaching, and internship experiences include interaction with parents/families."

Another current NCATE standard asserts that as part of the evaluation criteria, candidates must complete "...studies that help develop understanding and use of effective interactions with parents for supporting students' learning." This standard is one of the criteria used by NCATE to approve or reject teacher training programs for its certification. Of 1,362 teacher education programs in the U.S., 481 had been approved by NCATE.

Despite union claims to the contrary, two surveys conducted by the U.S. Department of Education show that there is little difference between recently trained NCATE and non-NCATE teachers.[7] Notwithstanding the adoption of the parent involvement standards, the executive board of NCATE does not include representation from a parent organization, nor is the National PTA one of NCATE's 33 constituent member organizations. In 1996, however, a representative of the National PTA provided written comments on the proposed parent involvement standard; however, at best, the National PTA represents less than ten percent of the parents of school aged children. Even if a PTA representative were to serve on the NCATE executive board, one parent on a board of 31 professional educators is not going to have much, if any influence.[8]

To be sure, other professional organizations that serve children do not have parent representation on their governing boards, hence NCATE's minimal inclusion of parents may not be significant.

Another NEA resolution calling for parent involvement is as follows:

A-25. Improving Neglected Educational Facilities.

> The National Education Association believes that because many educational facilities are in a state of crisis, as evidenced by decay, neglect, and continuing deterioration, such institutions must be provided with the necessary financial resources to increase staff and to provide improved instructional materials and adequate physical facilities.
>
> The Association also believes that the community, parents, guardians, students, teachers, and educational support personnel must be effectively involved in designing programs to implement positive change.
>
> Some suggested activities for parents include site-based, shared decision making in designing school facilities; and the development, implementation, and coordination of comprehensive school health programs.[9]

In addition to the above, NEA resolutions frequently refer to the necessity for parent training programs that sometimes include students and school personnel. The NEA suggests that these programs are needed to:

- "prepare parents to take an active role in the child's education";[10]
- minimize family/domestic violence;[11]
- prevent child abduction;[12]
- help parents cope with student stress and anger;[13]
- foster support and "training in child development, effective parenting skills, and strategies for dealing with disruptive students;"[14]
- "reduce student absences."[15]

With one exception, the NEA suggests or implies that training programs for parents be funded by school boards, committees or other entities, but not the NEA. The one exception is training to:

> identify and eliminate discrimination and stereotyping in all educational settings. Such plans, activities, and programs must increase respect, under-

> standing, acceptance, and sensitivity toward individuals and groups in a diverse society composed of such groups as American Indians/Alaska Natives, Asians and Pacific Islanders, Blacks, Hispanics, women, gays and lesbians, and people with disabilities.[16]

To accomplish these objectives, the NEA "encourages its affiliates to develop and implement training programs on these matters." [17] In 1993, the NEA developed a handbook for educators entitled "Affording Equal Opportunity to Gay and Lesbian Students Through Teaching and Counseling." In addition, the NEA advocates using "existing partnerships, such as those with the American Association of University Women (AAUW) and the National Organization for Women (NOW), to compile existing research and express its continued interest in the topic of sexual harassment." [18] To coordinate these and other activities, the co-chair of the NEA's Gay and Lesbian Educators Caucus is a member of the NEA Standing Committee on Human and Civil Rights.

AFT Resolutions Relating to Parents

None of the resolutions adopted at the AFT's 1998 convention referred explicitly to parents. Nevertheless, several AFT resolutions are intended to apply to parents. For example, AFT resolutions on sensitivity training and acceptance of diversity are intended to apply to parents as well as others. As in other resolutions, the AFT offers "assistance to locals and state federations, where needed, in drafting, negotiating and implementing contract provisions or, where collective bargaining has not yet been attained, advocating employment policies that prohibit such discrimination."[19] Other AFT resolutions that are intended to apply to parents as well as others relate to school safety, disruptive students, and the union's role in employee involvement/workplace cooperation.[20]

Although some NEA and AFT resolutions are substantially similar, one relating to volunteers differs slightly. In 1996, the AFT passed a resolution warning that volunteers could pose a threat to union jobs. AFT labeled the utilization of volunteers a "dangerous practice."[21] In 1998, del-

egates to the NEA Representative Assembly passed a resolution which is more restrictive than that passed by the AFT:

F-46. Volunteers in Public Schools

The National Education Association believes that parents and other community volunteers have a valuable role to play within the public schools. The proper use of volunteers is essential for the preservation of quality educational programs for children. Volunteers should be appropriately screened and trained as determined by the needs of the local school system and by state statutes. The screening should be for the sole purpose of eliminating volunteers who are convicted felons, child abusers, or sex offenders. Training should include, but not be limited to, the development of age-appropriate activities and sensitivity to diversity issues.

The Association deplores using volunteer workers for the purpose of reducing instructional budgets, reducing the number of full or part-time instructional positions, or reducing the number of full or part-time educational support personnel positions within a local school system.

The Association also believes that teachers and support personnel should be involved in the decision-making process regarding the utilization of volunteers within local school systems.[22]

...the two unions agree that volunteers (who are mainly parents), must never be utilized in ways that reduce union employees or union work.

In short, the two unions agree that volunteers (who are mainly parents), must never be utilized in ways that reduce union employees or union work. Needless to say, many parents would strongly disagree with the implication that their views are desirable mainly if not only on the utilization of volunteers. This implication follows from the absence of any NEA policies that explicitly support a more important policymaking role for parents.

Parents in the NEA's Legislative Agenda

After delegates to the RA approve NEA's resolutions, these resolutions drive the NEA's legislative agenda. In 1997-98, the NEA's legislative program included more than 20 main issues, and dozens of sub-issues. According to the *NEA Handbook*, the NEA categorizes its legislative objectives as follows:

- *NEA Legislative Initiatives* – Legislative issues developed and *initiated* by NEA that require continuing high activity levels to accomplish the goal;
- *NEA Current Congressional Issues* – Legislative issues requiring NEA, singly or through coalitions, to initiate *intensive activity* to advance NEA's objectives;
- *NEA Continuing Legislative Concerns* – Legislative issues constantly *monitored by NEA* that require appropriate NEA activity when matters arise in the Congress.[23]

As with its resolutions, however, very few of NEA's legislative objectives relate explicitly to parents. One that does is NEA's support of "federally guaranteed parental and medical leave covering the birth or adoption of a child..."[24] It should be noted that in bargaining with school boards, the NEA/AFT invariably propose parental leave for teachers. The NEA's proposed federal legislation would render it unnecessary for the unions to bargain for the parental leave benefit; consequently, no concessions would have to be made by the union to achieve the benefit.

Another legislative item calls for NEA to support the "development of collaborative programs among family, school, community, business, social services, and law enforcement agencies in the effort to reduce illegal gang-related activities."[25] Still another legislative objective is "positive involvement of parents, guardians, or designated care givers in the schools, and federal programs to assist parents in gaining parenting skills and in understanding child growth and development."[26]

The NEA's legislative program includes two other references to parents as part of NEA's current Congressional

issues.

"XVII. Tuition Tax Credits/Vouchers/Choice"

NEA supports:

- Parents right to choose, at their own expense, a nonpublic education for their children.

NEA opposes:

- Public funding of pre-K-12 nonpublic schools;
- Tuition tax credits for elementary or secondary schools;
- The use of vouchers or certificates in education;
- Federally mandated parental option or "choice" in education programs."[27]

In recent years, the NEA has combined its proposals for federal funding in its Quality Public Schools Agenda, a five-point program. Briefly, the five points are as follows:

1. "Safety and order in every school." Based on survey data, the NEA like the AFT and the National Congress of Parents and Teachers (PTA), have found that assaults on teachers and students are a major concern of parents, students, and teachers. Predictably, union solutions include additional federal grants and school staff dedicated to security. In addition, however, the unions have turned the issue of safety into a vehicle for greater "diversity".
2. "Every child ready to learn." This objective is the basis for NEA's support for universal health care for children and pregnant women, expansion of Head Start, along with increased funds for the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC).
3. "Every school building in good condition." This objective is the basis for NEA support of President Clinton's proposal for "...a $5 billion incentive plan designed to leverage $20 billion in new resources to upgrade our schools." Despite concerns of many local education officials and taxpayers on the political and constitutional issues raised by this proposal, the NEA and other public

school organizations are making a major effort to get federal funds for public school infrastructure. Obviously, if this objective can be met from federal funds, local and state revenues are freed up for teacher salaries and benefits, which absorb about 80 percent of state and local expenditures for education. Teacher welfare is not the main union objective here, but the welfare considerations are significant.

4. "Every student's classroom connected to new technologies." To implement this objective, the NEA calls for increased federal investments and resources for every public school and college classroom. Sensitive to criticisms that technology is a tool that many teachers aren't qualified to use, the unions are committed to federal funding to remedy the problem.

5. "A qualified teacher in every classroom." This is a cornerstone of NEA efforts to portray itself as "a new union." This effort includes NEA support for "peer review," the most controversial aspect of those efforts. In the "new unionism", the union and teachers would assume the responsibility for improving their colleagues' performance or terminating their employment. Not surprisingly, the NEA/AFT propose that Congress and the Clinton administration "Provide grants and other incentives for experienced teachers to mentor beginning teachers in the first and second year of teaching in the public schools."[28] As with most union sponsored reforms, the NEA/AFT expect the taxpayers to pay for it.

NEA's three highest legislative priorities . . . make no mention of parent involvement.

Although it is the first of NEA's three highest legislative priorities, the Quality Public Schools Agenda makes no mention of parent involvement. The other two priorities are increased federal funding for education, followed by NEA's support of:

> a federal statute that would guarantee meaningful collective bargaining rights to the employees of public schools, colleges, universities, and other post secondary institutions. This statute should allow for the continued operation

> of state statutes that meet federally established minimum standards. The federal statute should, in addition, assure that employees will not be denied bargaining rights solely because they participate in a site-based decision-making program, a faculty senate, or other system of collegial governance.[29]

As previously noted, several NEA policy statements that affect parents do not include "parent" in their wording. Undoubtedly, several, if implemented, would affect parents in more important ways than the resolutions and legislative priorities that explicitly refer to parents. It is open to question, however, whether awareness of these items, and the NEA programs to implement them, would provide a more positive picture of NEA/parent relations.

Many parents who oppose discrimination against gays and lesbians would strongly oppose NEA efforts to inject gay/lesbian issues into the elementary grades.

For example, NEA resolution B-7 calls for eliminating discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, disability, or sexual orientation.[30] In implementing its policies against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, the NEA has recommended the use of "It's Elementary", a video intended to train teachers on how to teach students in the elementary grades about gay/lesbian issues. In view of the political influence of the NEA's gay/lesbian caucus, it is not surprising that "It's Elementary" urges approval of gay/lesbian lifestyles; also that homophobia is an evil which must be overcome in its earliest stages. It is safe to say, however, that many parents who oppose discrimination against gays and lesbians would strongly oppose NEA efforts to inject gay/lesbian issues into the elementary grades. At a time when there is widespread concern about student proficiency in reading, writing, and computation, adding the NEA's social agenda to the elementary curriculum seems especially inappropriate. For that matter, gay and lesbian lifestyles raise complex social policy issues that are difficult even for adults to resolve. Unfortunately, the NEA's approach presents an extremely inaccurate and one-sided discussion of the issues relating to gay/lesbian lifestyles.

NEA Publications

Since 1994 when President Clinton signed Goals 2000, Improving America's Education Act, an industry has been built around increasing parent involvement. Goals 2000 includes eight goals; the eighth one follows:

> By the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children.[10]

To this end, the NEA's Center for the Revitalization of Urban Education (CRUE), developed its family-school-community training modules in 1996. The NEA training manual for the modules is intended to assist union leaders to adjust to the changing nature of union work and to ensure maximum effectiveness in carrying out the strategic plan of the union.[11] The strategic plan emphasizes community partnerships and coalition building to counter attacks on public education. It does not include any suggestions on how parents can help their children learn more; presumably, this outcome would result from adoption of the NEA legislative agenda.

From time to time, *NEA Today*, a monthly magazine, includes articles about cooperative programs between the PTA and the NEA to encourage parents to attend back-to-school nights, serve as fund raisers, sign "contracts" with students, and attend parent training sessions. For example, a 1998 article featured an NEA member who serves as a home/school consultant and a liaison between parents and the school. Her home visits are intended to help disadvantaged families to develop their children's study skills. Although the consultant attends parent-teacher conferences as a parent advocate, aggressive advocacy on behalf of parents is improbable in view of her union affiliation.[12] Clearly, these NEA suggestions regard parents as implementers of union and teacher initiatives. No attention is given to the possibility that parents might have ideas of their own about what teachers should do.

NEA publications include two videos that relate directly to parents: *Parents as Partners* and *Parental Involvement*.[13]

Both were advertised in the October 1998 issue of *NEA Today* as ways to involve parents. Nonetheless, these videos reflect the NEA's tendency to treat parents as teacher helpers who do not have any reason to question teacher actions. They also point out the value of recruiting parents to teacher union legislative objectives. Not surprisingly, *Parental Involvement* cites a teacher poll in which 94 percent of the teachers supported more "parent involvement."

Parents as Partners also praises training programs for parents. One such program was offered through a "Parent University," a program offered by an educational entrepreneur in Mesa, Arizona. The "Parent University" consisted of 11 courses, some consisting of one evening's work. In another highly praised program, teachers were released early on Thursdays to plan while parents administer over 20 programs for the students. This program costs the school nothing (except half a day's instruction by teachers) while parents pay for the afternoon's activities. Not surprisingly, this is the kind of "parent involvement" that the teacher unions prefer.

Opposition to legislation that would empower parents to choose the schools that would educate their children constitutes the NEA's highest legislative priority.

Parent Involvement highlights a Parent Resource Center funded by $97,000 from the U.S. Department of Education. The center's facilities included a washer, dryer, computers, and books for parent use; the center functions as a social work agency as much as an educational one. In another district, parent visits were encouraged, so much so that the school district employed a coordinator (former gang member) to coordinate the program.

Whatever the merits of these programs, they have not been widely adopted or led to any upsurge in parent involvement. Neither have the programs in Goals 2000, the controversial federal law known also as "Improving America's Schools Act of 1994" which received extensive NEA/AFT support. The 980-page law includes eight goals and extensive federal mandates tied to federal funds as incentives for states to achieve the goals. Despite the fact that increased parent involvement was one of the goals in Goals 2000, evaluations of its programs have conceded that the programs have

not stimulated an increase in parent involvement.[34]

To summarize, the NEA defines and encourages parent involvement in ways that reduce the teacher workload and take the legitimacy of union policies and teacher conduct for granted. Through its legislative agenda, the NEA encourages federally funded training programs for parents that cover a variety of topics, none of which envisages any change in union/parent relations. Meanwhile opposition to legislation that would empower parents to choose the schools that would educate their children constitutes the NEA's highest legislative priority.

AFT Publications for Parents

Parents working for school choice or trying to terminate incompetent teachers are just as "involved" as parents involved in preserving the status quo in public schools.

To begin with, the most prominent AFT publications relating to parents are not really AFT publications. The U.S. Department of Education allows organizations to publish department publications as long as the department is shown as a co- author. The content of the publication is in the public domain, but the co-sponsoring organization appears to be the co-author to anyone not fully informed about the arrangement. The co-sponsoring organizations agree to disseminate the publications widely. This arrangement enables the co-sponsoring organizations to be perceived as addressing a problem without risking any of its own funds to publish the materials that address it.

In the case at hand, five "AFT" publications on parent involvement, co-sponsored with the U.S. Department of Education, are devoted to how parents can help their children learn to read, become sufficient in mathematics and science, learn responsible behavior, and succeed in school. The recommendations for parent involvement in these publications are similar if not identical to those included in hundreds of commercial and nonprofit publications on the subject. Not surprisingly, the AFT publications never mention the treatment of parents in collective bargaining contracts; one would never know that such contracts existed from looking at AFT publications for parents.[35]

In addition, the AFT provides a packet of materials entitled "Involving Parents". The packet includes 27 reprints, of which 6 are from AFT sources. The items deal mainly with research on parent involvement, all showing that it has a positive effect on student achievement; however, none of the items mentions the impact of teacher union bargaining on parent involvement.

To summarize, all NEA/AFT materials on parent involvement define it in ways that strengthen or do not challenge teacher and union roles in education. Granted, it would be unrealistic to expect any other course of action from the teacher unions; few, if any, organizations encourage criticism of their role, whatever it may be. The point is however, that others need not and perhaps should not accept definitions of "parent involvement" that exclude parent actions that question or criticize teacher or union actions. Parents working for school choice or trying to terminate incompetent teachers are just as "involved" as parents involved in preserving the status quo in public schools. Be that as it may, we have yet to consider the policies of local NEA/AFT affiliates with respect to parents and parent involvement. These policies are typically embodied in the collective bargaining contracts between the local unions and their boards of education. A brief look at the treatment of parents in these contracts is very instructive and is the subject of the following chapter.

* If implemented, Resolution A-2 would require an amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which is widely interpreted as treating education as a state responsibility.

Chapter 3
Parents and Teacher Union Contracts

As we have just seen, NEA and AFT publications acknowledge the important role that parents can play in education. For the most part, these publications advise parents on ways to help their children in schools. Although unexceptional, most of this advice simply repeats what many others have said; there is nothing new in urging that children should get a good night's sleep and a nutritious breakfast before going to school.

The fact is, however, that NEA/AFT policy statements do not address some of the most important issues relating to parent involvement. These issues come to the fore when unions bargain with school boards. For this reason, let us consider parent involvement in the collective bargaining context.

We begin by reviewing a model union contract disseminated by a state education association to its local affiliates. This model contract illustrates what the state NEA affiliates advise their local affiliates to propose in collective negotiations. For this reason, what they tell us cannot be dismissed as unique or exceptional; instead, they reflect the ideal arrangements governing union/parent relations as envisaged by the state teacher unions.

The sole provisions relating to parents in the model union contract are as follows:

1. Any complaints regarding a teacher made to any member of the administration by any parent, student, or other person which does or may influence evaluation of a teacher shall be processed as follows:

    a. The principal or immediate superior shall meet and inform the teacher of the full nature of the complaint and they shall attempt to resolve the matter informally.

    b. The teacher shall have the right to be represented by the union at any meetings or conferences regarding

such complaint.

2. In the event a complaint is unresolved to the satisfaction of all parties, the teacher may request a conference with the complainant to attempt to resolve the complaint. At the request of the teacher or the complainant, the complaint shall be reviewed by the building principal or counterpart supervisor if the complaint is unresolved as a result of such conference, or if no mutually acceptable resolution can be agreed upon.

3. Any complaint unresolved by the above procedures, may be submitted in writing by the complainant or the teacher to the building principal or counterpart supervisor, who shall forthwith forward a copy to the superintendent or his designee and the complainant. Upon receipt of the written complaint, the superintendent or his designee shall confer with all parties. The teacher shall have the right to be present at all meetings of the superintendent or his designee and the complainant.

4. If the superintendent or his designee is unable to resolve a complaint to the satisfaction of all parties concerned, at the request of the complainant or the teacher he shall forward the results of his investigation along with his recommendation, in writing, to the Board and a copy to all parties oncerned.

5. After receipt of the findings and recommendations of the superintendent or his designee, and before action thereon, the Board shall afford the parties the opportunity to meet with the Board and show cause why the recommendations of the superintendent or his designee should not be followed. Copies of the action taken by the Board shall be forwarded to all parties. Any complaint unresolved by the board may be submitted by the teacher to arbitration in the grievance procedure.

Elsewhere in the model contract, the union proposes that "Any question or criticism by a supervisor, administrator, or board member of a teacher and his instructional methodology shall be made in confidence and not in the presence of students, parents, or other public gatherings."[36]

The following points about the foregoing provisions

relating to parents should be noted:

- They are the only explicit reference to parents in the model union contract; however, several provisions that apply to others also apply to parents.
- Any complaints that "may influence evaluation of the teacher" means that the provision applies to virtually any complaint.
- If the union proposal is accepted, it could render informal resolution of complaints virtually impossible. Suppose parents believe their child has unfairly received a low grade. The parent is expressing a "complaint" but not necessarily one that the parent wishes to follow up in the union recommended complaint procedure. At the time the complaint is made, there may be no way to decide definitively that it will never affect the evaluation of the teacher. Many times complaints are ignored until it becomes clear that they reflect a pattern; in that case, complaints that appear to be innocuous when made may affect the evaluation later on.
- No matter how trivial the complaint, the teacher would have the right to conferences with the building principal, superintendent, and school board over it, accompanied by a union representative. If not satisfied, the teacher could even submit the matter to arbitration. This right is available even though the complaint might never affect the evaluation of the teacher. The proposed item illustrates the fact that while the teacher unions are quick to criticize school district bureaucracies, union initiated bargaining proposals are often the main reason why these bureaucracies have emerged.
- Negative evaluations per se do not necessarily have any influence whatsoever on a teacher's terms and conditions of employment. The overwhelming majority, perhaps 99 percent or more of the nation's public school teachers, are paid on the basis of their years of teaching experience and academic credits; teacher evaluations or merit play an insignificant role in teacher compensation, as it does in this model contract.

Negative teacher evaluations often do not have any practical consequences for several reasons:

- The teacher may correct any deficiencies.
- The teacher may leave or retire from employment with the district. For example, a negative evaluation the year before retirement would not affect teacher compensation in any way.
- School administrators and school boards that agreed to the union proposal would be unable to administer the schools if there were a significant number of complaints. The costs in time would be immense. Again, these costs would be incurred even though the criticism and the subsequent evaluation played no role whatsoever in the teacher's compensation or working conditions. No sensible employer would allow arbitration on every complaint made about an employee.
- There is no way the school district, the union, and/or the arbitrator can require complaining parents to appear at administrative or arbitration hearings. The parents may have jobs that preclude attendance or they may simply prefer not to appear even though they believe the complaint is justified; however, if the parents do not show up for the arbitration hearing, the arbitrator would have to rule in favor of the teacher.

Our first example illustrates how the unions protect teachers against parental involvement that poses a threat to teachers.

Let us now consider the provisions relating explicitly to parents in various teacher union contracts from California, Florida, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. The examples cited below are presented verbatim, except for minor editorial changes to avoid identifying the districts. This was done because the examples are run of the mill and it would be unfair to give the impression that these district contracts are unusual. Some provisions refer explicitly to parents and some are more general, but all constitute the only contractual provision that applies directly to parents.

Our first example illustrates how the unions protect teachers against parental involvement that poses a threat to teachers.

In the event that the Board shall receive any

> written communications from persons who are not employed by the District, the teacher shall be notified within a reasonable time and shall be given an opportunity to read such communications; however, the name of the author may be withheld by the Board. If any communication is included in the teacher's file, full disclosure, including the names or sources must be given.
>
> Information from any source unknown to the teacher shall not be used as the basis for disciplinary action under any circumstances.
>
> The teacher shall have the right to make a written reply to any communications received, as described in this section. Said reply shall be attached to the allegation or information during the time that it is included in the teacher's personnel file.

The provision cited above illustrates several objections to union proposed procedures for resolving parental complaints. First, it is highly questionable whether the school board should obligate itself to notify teachers "within a reasonable time" of any written communication from nondistrict personnel and should commit the board to giving teachers the right to read all such communications. In many situations, deleting the name of the author would not assure confidentiality regarding the source. For example, if an anonymous communication suggests that a teacher is stealing gate receipts, it may be desirable to observe the teacher instead of alerting the teacher to the communication.

The district obligation to give the source of information used as "the basis for disciplinary action is likewise questionable. Many parents would not express their feelings if their names were revealed to teachers. Bear in mind that disclosure is required even if disciplinary action is not taken or even contemplated. Teachers should have the right to know and rebut the evidence that is the basis for disciplinary action, but this does not necessarily require that teachers be informed of "the source" of the evidence.

Interestingly enough, the unions do not restrict teachers this way when the teachers wish to complain about the

administration; typically, the unions invariably propose the right to initiate grievances without the name of any teacher disadvantaged by the action complained about. This is a standard union proposal even though it would be an unfair labor practice for the district to retaliate against any teacher filing a grievance. It should be noted that parents and their children do not enjoy such statutory protection against teacher reprisals.

Furthermore, when a complaint is first received, the district has no way of knowing whether the teacher's conduct is part of a pattern or not. If an anonymous complaint asserts that the teacher uses foul language, the district would have to include the complaint in the teacher's file and allow it to be carried to arbitration if the union so desired, throw the complaint away, or maintain two files on the teacher, normally a violation of the contract. The sensible alternative would be to include the complaint in the teacher's file and allow the teacher to append a response to the complaint. If a similar complaint did not arise again, the matter would be resolved; if a similar complaint(s) did arise subsequently, the initial complaint would be relevant to district action.

The basic problem with the union approach is that it applies the standard of due process in criminal cases to the employment context. Of course, in the employment context, teachers may have significant interests, such as continued employment at risk, and the legal standards of due process should protect teaches from unjustified loss of these interests. Nevertheless, it is a major mistake to treat all parent complaints as if they are or might be the basis for disciplinary action that requires due process safeguards.

Some contracts are vague on the terminal point of the complaint procedure. For example, one such contract provision provides:

> Whenever a parent brings a complaint against a teacher without first notifying the teacher, the teacher shall be notified immediately of the parent's complaint. The administrator may arrange a conference between the teacher and parent at a mutually acceptable time.

> If the teacher-parent conference does not resolve the problem, the administrator may then participate in the conference.

The above provision raises this question: What constitutes "resolving" the problem? Is the problem resolved if the teacher or the parent still feels dissatisfied after the teacher/parent conference? How much discretion should teachers have in setting a time and place for a teacher/parent conference? One might suppose that the district would assume the responsibility, taking into account the views of both teachers and parents.

Some contracts protect teachers from "abusive" parents; it would be interesting to get the views of parents in the school district that agreed to the following item:

> Teachers will not be required to interrupt lessons to participate in parent/teacher conferences. Parent/teacher conferences will normally be scheduled no earlier than the day following a parental request unless an earlier time is agreed to by the teacher. Prior notice will be provided teachers of scheduled conferences.
>
> A teacher may end a conference between the teacher and the parent(s) if the parent(s) is abusive. The teacher shall report the incident to the principal and request rescheduling of the conference with administrative participation. During this rescheduled conference or subsequently rescheduled conference(s) the teacher may request that the conference(s) be stopped and rescheduled if the parent(s) is again abusive. The administrator participant(s) will not unreasonably deny such a request.

The above example is much more specific in responding to parental complaints, but it hardly constitutes a "Welcome" sign for parents. The district should have insisted upon additional language that requires teachers to conduct themselves professionally in parent/teacher conferences.

The teacher union contracts frequently treat teachers as rightfully immune from parent criticism. Consider the

following item:

> Whenever a complaint is made about a teacher, the principal shall accept and acknowledge the complaint.
>
> The principal shall inform the teacher of the complaint, his/her response, the action the principal contemplates, and the results of such action. When any action will affect the status of the teacher, a written record shall be made.
>
> No teacher shall be subject to harassment, abusive language, and/or upbraiding by parents, other citizens, students and/or other district employees.
>
> No action affecting the teacher's status shall be instituted based upon an anonymous complaint.

Vague language is used to protect teachers against disciplinary action based on parental complaints.

The above item illustrates how vague language is used to protect teachers against disciplinary action based on parental complaints: to say that a teacher shall not be subject to "upbraiding" can certainly be construed to prohibit virtually any censure or sharp reproach by anyone, including district administrators. Note that prohibiting parents from "upbraiding" teachers would infringe on the 1st Amendment rights of parents. The following item implies that teachers must be subject to legitimate criticism, but places dubious procedural limitations in the expression of them.

Reprimand or Criticism

> The employer's administrators shall not reprimand or criticize an employee in the presence of the employee's colleagues or students, or in the presence of the parents of such students. When reprimand or criticism is deemed necessary, it shall be made with discretion and out of public view and hearing.
>
> If the conference is held at a location other than the assigned school center, the employee shall be entitled to have a witness.

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This example is excessively protective of teachers when parents complain. Suppose the parent complains, and the principal holds a meeting that includes the parent and teacher. Suppose also that it is clear beyond any doubt that the teacher deserves a reprimand. In some situations, it would be desirable to reprimand the teacher on the spot, instead of conducting a separate meeting with the teacher to take this action. When it may be necessary to discipline teachers, contractual language is usually interpreted strictly in favor of the teachers. Consequently, contractual language that appears to be acceptable on its face must be evaluated in terms of a worst-case-scenario. The following item illustrates this point:

> No action affecting future employment status shall be taken on the basis of a complaint by a parent, or student or other individual, nor shall any action be included in the teacher's personnel file, unless the matter is reported to the teacher in writing.

This provision is not clear on who must report "the matter" in writing. If the complaining parent must do so, the clause is indefensible; a complaint by illiterate parents could not become the basis of disciplinary action. The following item illustrates the excessive procedural protections for teachers to be found in many teacher union contracts:

> When a written complaint concerning a teacher's conduct and/or performance is made by the parent of a student or any other member of the public, the supervising administrator shall attempt to resolve the complaint with the complaining party and consult with the teacher involved. No complaint shall be placed in the personnel file until such time as the complaint has been sustained through an impartial hearing procedure or the parties involved have mutually agreed to the disposition of the complaint.

A major problem with this article is that it requires the district to submit every challenged complaint to an "impartial hearing." This is excessive and unnecessary protection for teachers. As in most contracts, the teacher has the right

to append his/her response to any written complaint. If the district never takes any action adverse to the teacher as a result of the complaint, the "impartial hearing" was unnecessary. If the district later takes some action based in part on the complaint, the teacher would have a full opportunity to challenge the criticism at that time. If there is "an impartial hearing," the complaining parent(s) may not have the time or the inclination to get involved in a hearing; however, if the parent(s) did not show up at the hearing, the teacher would avoid any disciplinary action at the hearing. Again, it must be emphasized that the above procedure is available to contest complaints that may ultimately have no effect whatsoever on teacher evaluations. Needless to say, the district should not have agreed to allow an impartial hearing before it could place a complaint with the teacher's response in the teacher's file.

The following observations about the foregoing examples should be noted:

- The examples were selected because of their representative character, not because they were the most extreme or unique provisions in teacher union contracts relating to parents.
- They are the only explicit reference to parents in the collective bargaining contracts.
- In the contracts, most of the examples are included under headings labeled "Complaints," "Complaint Procedures," or "Teacher Rights."
- None of the examples sets forth the affirmative obligations of teachers with respect to parental concern or complaints. It is possible, however, that these obligations are set forth in board policy outside of the contract.
- The negotiated procedures on parental complaints are much less sensitive to the concerns of parents than the complaint procedures in the private sector. Whereas teacher union proposals make it as difficult as possible for parents to express their criticisms to responsible officials, most private sector companies invite criticisms in order to identify and resolve customer concerns.

- Fundamentally, the teacher union proposals treat parent complaints as tantamount to criminal charges. It is one thing to propose that "due process" should prevail when teachers are being fired, but to apply the same features of due process to criticisms or complaints or concerns is a major mistake. The teacher unions not only provide excessive protection for incompetent teachers long before the firing stage; the unions are major obstacles to realistic evaluation of teachers, and eliciting candid reactions to teacher performance.

One can legitimately criticize the school boards for agreeing to the provisions discussed above, but it is important to recognize the context in which school board acceptance takes place. In many school districts, the teacher unions play a decisive role in electing members of the school board; the concessions to the unions that often follow are frequently contrary to parental interests. Sometimes school boards are not aware of the negative consequences of their agreements and sometimes they are not able to do anything about it anyway. In any event, our concern here is the union's vision of teacher/parent relationships; clearly, it is a vision that minimizes the expression of parent concerns.

Thousands of private sector companies fulfill both objectives, suggestions and criticisms . . . perhaps because they must compete against other companies that are customer friendly.

Although the union's job is to protect teachers, such protection should not create obstacles to the expression of parent concerns or to appropriate action on them. A school district can encourage and facilitate parental suggestions and criticisms while providing adequate protection for teachers against unfair treatment. Thousands of private sector companies fulfill both objectives every day of the year, perhaps because they must compete against other companies that are customer friendly.

Is the preceding analysis unfair because it treats the contractual provisions relating to parents as the complete picture of union/parent relations? The fact is that on several contractual issues that affect parents even when the latter are not mentioned explicitly, the union positions are just as hostile to parent interests as the complaint procedures discussed above. The unions propose, and often succeed in negotiat-

ing, the following items affecting parents.

- Teachers cannot be required to meet with parents outside of the regular school day. This means that parents who have to work or take care of other children during regular school hours, cannot confer face to face with their children's teachers.
- No grades can be changed without teacher consent. Thus, no matter how unfair or biased the teacher's grade may be, it cannot be changed unless the teacher agrees to the change.
- Parent volunteers can perform work done by teachers only if the union agrees to this. The reason for this prohibition is that the unions are opposed to allowing anyone outside the bargaining unit performing "unit work," even as a volunteer. Significantly, none of the NEA/AFT publications relating to parents suggests that parent interests are affected by school board/union contracts. Perhaps the reason is that these contracts treat parents as nuisances to be avoided, not as partners in a joint enterprise.

Chapter 4
The Role of the PTA

As we have seen, the teacher unions negotiate contracts that severely curtail parent expressions of concern about teachers. This point raises a question about the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and its state and local affiliates. In popular opinion, the PTA is supposed to reflect parent interests and policies preferred by most parents. Surprising as it may be, however, the PTA's legal position is that it is not primarily an educational organization. Instead, the National PTA views itself as an organization concerned about all issues affecting children. The fact that the title of most PTAs include the name of a school is said to be only for the purpose of identifying the physical location of local PTAs.

The PTA has adopted a policy of neutrality on teacher bargaining issues, no matter how much they affect parent rights and concerns.

Be that as it may, what is the PTA's position on union contracts that ignore or severely limit parent rights? The answer is that the PTA has no position on bargaining issues that affect parents. Instead, the PTA has adopted a policy of neutrality on teacher bargaining issues, no matter how much they affect parent rights and concerns. How this came to pass and its implications are one of the most important untold stories in American education.[17] Here, we can only provide the highlights of this astonishing story.

Although its origins go back to 1897, the National PTA adopted its present title in 1923. Until the 1960s, PTA worked closely with school administrators and during most of this time, the PTA occupied space in the NEA building in Washington, DC. Throughout this period, the NEA enrolled administrators as well as teachers. Although the NEA enrolled far fewer superintendents than teachers, the superintendents completely dominated the NEA; the superintendents' power over teachers in the schools ensured their power over them in organizations that included both teachers and administrators.

When the NEA became a union in the 1960s, its relationship with the PTA underwent drastic changes. Prior to

collective bargaining, teachers were employed on the basis of individual contracts that specified teacher salaries and the work year, leaving practically everything else up to the discretion of the school board. Under collective bargaining, however, teachers are employed pursuant to union contracts that spell out the terms and conditions of teacher employment. These contracts between the unions and school boards supersede the individual contracts between school boards and teachers.

In the pre-bargaining era, the PTAs worked closely with school management, and for a good reason. Management had the power to run the school district. If a local PTA wanted to initiate a particular program or activity, it had only to persuade the school administrators who exercised broad discretion over the district budget and terms and conditions of teacher employment. Furthermore, although they lacked financial resources, local PTAs played a significant legitimizing role; their approval was valuable even though PTAs were not politically powerful in their own right.

In the 1960s and 1970s, however, teacher unionization drastically altered the balance of power at the local level. Teacher union dues escalated to pay for union staff to negotiate contracts and process grievances. When negotiations were completed, usually for multi-year contracts, the union staff served as full-time political operatives, amply equipped with the facilities and campaign workers to be a formidable political force.

Collective bargaining empowered the unions, but weakened parents and PTAs in several ways. In collective bargaining, third parties are rarely present or allowed to be present at the bargaining tables. Theoretically, the negotiators for the school district are supposed to look out for parental concerns, but it is easy to see why they typically fail to do so. There is no parental representation at the bargaining table, and parental political influence is minuscule compared to that of the teacher unions. Indeed, the unions are often directly responsible for the election of school board members who establish the board's bottom line and must vote to ratify or to reject the negotiated agreement.

Instead of presenting its views at open board meetings

on an equal basis with the teacher organizations and other parties in interest, the PTA was forced to express its views at contract ratification meetings when the matters of concern were a done deal. Theoretically, the school district could keep the PTA informed on the progress of negotiations and receive its input on union positions, but the dynamics of bargaining preclude this outcome. Both union and management prefer not to have third parties involved, partly because their objections make it more difficult to reach agreement. For instance, if the union proposes that only parental complaints in writing can be a basis for disciplinary action, it will try to avoid the presence of parties opposed to this requirement. By the same token, school districts try to avoid the presence of parties who might oppose concessions the district negotiators are willing to make. Furthermore, if information about negotiations is provided to third parties such as parents, there is a danger of leaks and distortions that could upset negotiations. If the PTA is entitled to information about the progress of negotiations, other groups will be also, and the requisite confidentiality for successful bargaining will disappear altogether. If bargaining goes on until the early morning hours, or around the clock, it is not feasible to get parental input in the climactic stages of bargaining.

Understandably, local PTAs frequently found themselves in opposition to union demands; when this happened, PTA/union relations at the local level deteriorated rapidly. The tensions between PTAs and teacher unions came to a head in teacher strikes. Parents were highly inconvenienced by teacher strikes; also, they were often concerned about the example being set (most teacher strikes were illegal) and pupil safety when school was not in session. In contrast, the teacher unions characterized teacher strikes as a pupil benefit; also the unions cited concern about pupil safety as a reason to keep children at home, thereby putting more pressure on school boards to settle on union terms.

The PTA Board Takes a Stand

To help formulate its policy on teacher strikes and bargaining issues, the National PTA appointed a task force to recommend PTA policies on these matters. The task force

elicited opinions from teacher unions, school boards, school administrators and others. After receiving the task force report, the PTA's national board of directors adopted policies relating to the role of the PTA in teacher strikes. At its September 1968 meeting, the board first identified several "dilemmas" that teacher strikes and negotiations posed for local PTA members.

1. If the PTA provides volunteers to man the classrooms during a work stoppage, in the interest of protecting the immediate safety and welfare of children, it is branded as a strike breaker.
2. If the PTA does not take sides in issues being negotiated, it is accused of not being interested.
3. If it supports the positions of the board of education, which is the representative of the public in negotiations, the teacher members of the PTA have threatened to withdraw membership and boycott the local PTA activities."

To resolve these dilemmas, the PTA adopted guidelines covering the pre-strike period, the period during the strike, and the aftermath of the strike. According to these guidelines PTA members should:

Pre-strike period:

1. Help teachers to achieve greater job satisfactions and higher salaries;
2. Identify early symptoms of teacher dissatisfaction; and
3. Try to correct their basic causes;
4. Urge school boards and local teacher unions to develop written agreements on negotiation and grievance procedures;
5. Provide full public discussion of bargaining issues that affect children;
6. Avoid compulsory teacher attendance at PTA meetings.

During the Strike:

1. Urge immediate, continuous negotiations and try to get schools open as soon as possible;
2. Inform the public about the disagreements and the progress of negotiations;
3. Refuse to serve as volunteer teachers during a strike. If volunteers are needed, they should be recruited outside the PTA structure;
4. Suggest actions to protect children while schools are closed during strikes;
5. Encourage teacher members to participate fully in PTA activities.

After the strike:

1. Try to restore harmony, promote teacher morale, and parent-teacher communications;
2. Monitor negotiated agreements to ensure they are "faithfully implemented";
3. Foster community support for school needs.

Despite the PTA's neutrality, PTA/union conflict continued to escalate at the state as well as the local level. The basic issue was whether the PTA would represent parental or union interests. Developments in Ohio illustrate how the issue was resolved nationally.

> In Ohio, the state PTA and the powerful Ohio Education Association, an NEA affiliate, came to blows over three bills in the state legislature. Two of these involved teacher certification, training and dismissal; the third was a strong professional negotiations bill that included binding arbitration. The state PTA actively—and successfully—opposed several of OEA's legislative proposals in these areas, and that was when OEA apparently decided enough was enough. At its 1976 state convention, OEA adopted a resolution asking its 85,000 teachers to drop out of the PTA, to boycott all its activities, and to encourage par-

ents to form new parent-teacher organizations that are not affiliated with the PTA.[39] Of the 217,000 members who quit the PTA in 1976, more than 50,000 were from Ohio, where entire units disaffiliated.

Robert Lucas, president of the Ohio PTA, described the change in attitude of the union towards the PTA after it challenged the teacher union: 'For years we did everything the teacher association wanted and we never disagreed about anything. We gave out certificates, awarded the principal a seat of honor and carried all the tax levies, and we were the nicest guys in the world. Now that we're beginning to deal with real issues, they have a different opinion of us.'[40]

Eventually, teacher strikes led to crises that forced a resolution of the conflict. In the first place the incidence of teacher strikes increased dramatically as teachers unionized. Furthermore, for every strike, there were scores of threatened strikes that led to turmoil in school districts. Naturally, teachers and their unions viewed the strikes more benignly than parents. The unions sometimes were able to recruit parents to their cause, but most parents were more concerned about the disruption to their own lives and their children's education than about the strike issues.

With limited funds, a highly transient membership, heavy dependence upon teacher support just to remain viable, and intimidated by teacher boycotts, the National PTA capitulated to the NEA again in 1987.

With limited funds, a highly transient membership, heavy dependence upon teacher support just to remain viable, and intimidated by teacher boycotts, the National PTA capitulated to the NEA again in 1987. First, its board of directors affirmed its 1968 position with only a few editorial changes. Fearful of the consequences of a declaration of independence from the NEA, the PTA reaffirmed its neutrality on bargaining issues, even when the interests of parents and students required a strong advocate.

To appreciate the implications of PTA neutrality in teacher bargaining, one must consider what its guidelines recommend – and also what they do not mention. The guide-

lines include eighteen recommendations that either imply or suggest that strikes are justified or ensure PTA support of union positions during a strike. The possibility that a teacher strike might be due to unreasonable union demands is never mentioned, even implicitly. On the contrary, by urging PTAs to "seek action that corrects the basic cause of dissatisfaction," the resolution obviously favors the unions; "teacher dissatisfaction" is not always justified or merits PTA intervention. In fact, it is often generated by the unions to put more pressure on school boards to make concessions in negotiations. Furthermore, the PTA's repeated support for "negotiations" during a strike implies that the school boards have not fully met their obligations to negotiate in good faith. The PTA guidelines ignore the fact that the teacher unions have adequate remedies, such as filing unfair labor practice charges against school boards that do not negotiate in good faith. The guidelines recommend that PTAs make sure that negotiated agreements are "faithfully implemented". Aside from the fact that it is the unions who claim that contracts are being violated, the unions have ample legal remedies and resources to remedy such violations.

PTA policy does not address parental concerns over items on which school boards are required to bargain.

Significantly, PTA policy does not address parental concerns over items on which school boards are required to bargain. Several, such as the following, would be high priority issues in any organization claiming to represent parent and pupil interests in collective bargaining:

- What are teacher responsibilities to help pupils outside of regular class hours?
- How long do teachers remain in school after class to assist pupils and/or confer with parents?
- Are there adequate student/parent grievance procedures?
- Is there any appeal from teacher grades, or negative recommendations to employers and institutions of higher education?
- Do teacher contracts provide adequate opportunities for parents to confer with teachers? For example, if parents work during regular school hours, are there opportunities

to meet with parents at some other time during the day?

- Do pupil report cards convey adequate information about pupil progress?
- What is the impact of teacher seniority on continuity of instruction and teacher/pupil relationships?
- What criteria are included in teacher evaluations?
- What is the district policy on teacher tenure?
- Do the district teachers have the qualifications to teach the grade(s) and subject(s) assigned?
- How does the district deal with a negative teacher evaluation?
- What is the percentage of teachers who have received unfavorable evaluations in the past 2-3 years?[1]

Of course, the above questions must ordinarily be answered at the local level; the National PTA could not possibly adopt specific answers to these questions that would be appropriate for all local PTAs. Nevertheless, the following observations are justified:

- The PTA's neutrality policy prohibits local PTAs from adopting and pursuing appropriate local policies on these issues.
- The PTA could adopt criteria that would alert local PTAs to the importance of the issues and help them adopt appropriate local policies.
- On many other issues, the National PTA has adopted criteria for local policies, leaving it to local PTAs to adopt the specific policies that would meet the criteria.

In any event, as a result of its "neutrality" policy, local PTAs do not address these issues, or any others that might lead to conflict with the teacher unions. Meanwhile, as pointed out in Chapter 3, the teacher unions aggressively bargain for their positions on all such issues. For instance, the teacher unions typically propose the following:

- No student grade may be changed without the consent of the teacher. Obviously, this assumes that teachers always agree to correct their mistakes.

- Teachers cannot be required to return in the evening or on weekends for parent conferences; if they do return voluntarily, they must be paid generously. Such proposals severely limit parent access to teachers.
- Parent complaints cannot be considered as a basis for disciplinary action unless the complaint is in writing and the teacher has had time off with pay to prepare a response. Imagine having a complaint against a department store, only to be told that your complaint can't be considered unless you put it in writing.
- If a parent has a complaint, the teacher has the right to have a union representative present when the parent faces the teacher.

PTA domination by the teacher unions is subtle but highly effective.

Parents, who are not literate in English, such as itinerant farm workers,would be hopelessly intimidated in districts that accept such union proposals; even sophisticated parents are often deterred from pursuing their complaints against such obstacles. Nevertheless, the PTA's neutrality policy, which is still operative, prohibits local PTAs from taking a position on bargaining issues.

The Aftermath of the Union Takeover

PTA members and officials often bristle at the suggestion that the PTA is dominated by the teacher unions. If one thinks of domination only in terms of explicit union commands to the PTA, this reaction is understandable. In practice, however, teacher union domination is subtle but highly effective. It shows up in the selection of speakers and convention programs, the issues that are voted upon and the ones shoved under the rug, the avoidance of union identification among delegates to PTA conventions, the immediate put-downs of any effort to raise union issues, the similarity between PTA and teacher union legislative agendas, and the PTA's leading role in union-funded coalitions. Furthermore, by its own admission, the PTA has never disagreed with the NEA on any significant, substantive issue.[42] This is an astonishing admission in view of the conflicts of interest be-

tween parents as consumers of educational services and teachers as producers of them.

At state and national PTA conventions, the union presence is pervasive but not usually apparent to convention delegates. Inasmuch as the divisive union/parent issues are not raised, delegates are not aware of any coercion to adopt union positions. Delegates who are employed by the teacher unions or are teacher union activists frequently conceal that fact. Sometimes union officials are identified as such on PTA programs, but the union stake in the issues is artfully concealed. For example, at the 1998 national convention, the speaker on charter schools was Joan Buckley, who directs AFT programs on educational issues. Officially, the AFT does not oppose charter schools. Instead, its strategy is to concede the abstract possibility that charter schools may be a constructive reform while insisting upon requirements that render it virtually impossible to establish charter schools. In listing the AFT's utopian criteria for a good charter school, Buckley never mentioned the AFT's position that charter school employees be subject to a union contract. Actually, if her other conditions were accepted, there would never be a charter school. Of course, having a union official as the sole speaker in a two-hour program on charter schools is indefensible if the objective is a fair analysis of their rationale and operations. It is tantamount to having only a representative of the tobacco companies address a two hour meeting on tobacco issues.

When local PTAs oppose union positions in collective bargaining, the NEA does not hesitate to remind the PTA that its only option is to remain silent.

To summarize, the PTA has accepted its subordinate role; new members simply take it for granted that the PTA will be a support group for teachers and teacher unions; supposedly, pupils will benefit as a result. Inasmuch as what the unions seek for teachers is not always good for parents or students, the PTA's neutrality is a major strategic victory for the NEA and AFT. When local PTAs oppose union positions in collective bargaining, the NEA does not hesitate to remind the PTA that its only option is to remain silent. In April 1994, at the urging of its executive committee, NEA president Keith Geiger wrote to the president of the National

PTA after the relationship between the NEA and a local PTA did not improve following settlement of a job action. Geiger "...emphasized the long-standing tradition of cooperation and respect between the two organizations at the national level and asked the PTA president to remind its local affiliate of the National PTA's policy of neutrality in labor/management disputes in school districts."[43] Needless to say, local NEA affiliates do not object to PTA support for union positions; in fact, the locals frequently try to obtain their support in bargaining disputes. Unfortunately, if the parents, the parties most likely to be disadvantaged by union proposals are silent, it becomes more difficult for others to challenge them.

To some extent, the union-domination thesis may be erroneous because PTA leadership probably shares much of the educational and social/political views of union leaders. Both groups support the agenda of the left wing of the Democratic party.[44] PTA leaders who aspire to National PTA leadership fear they will never attain it if they criticize PTA policies. The perception may be mistaken, but it suffices to stifle open dissent among aspirants to leadership positions. In any case, because local PTAs are supposed to be bound by National PTA policy, the PTA's neutrality in collective bargaining has removed the PTA as a player on the school issues that matter most to parents.

The PTA often serves as the front organization for the coalitions of public school organizations (educational producers).

What is unusual about the PTA is that it often serves as the front organization for the coalitions of public school organizations (educational producers). Although producer organizations are usually much more powerful than consumer or client organizations (such as parent organizations) in our society, this is an astonishing outcome for an organization that would not accept teachers as members when it was founded.

Chapter 5
Summary and Conclusions

Perhaps our first conclusion is that there is a huge gap between union rhetoric and union practice with respect to "parent involvement." The rhetoric urges and praises "parent involvement"; the practice discourages it, unless parent involvement supports teacher or teacher union agendas. To the NEA and AFT, "parent involvement" is less oriented to helping children learn than it is to supporting union policy and legislative objectives, such as higher pay for teachers. Parents who criticize teachers are not "involved"; they are "misguided" or "right wing extremists" or "enemies of public schools".

A definition of parent involvement should recognize that it may have undesirable as well as desirable consequences. It should also recognize that "involvement" is not synonymous with support for teacher and/or union policies and practices. If these simple facts were recognized, it would be possible to have a sensible discussion about what kinds of involvement are constructive and what kinds are not. In the meantime, the teacher unions and the PTA will continue to define and advocate "parent involvement" as support for teacher or union or National PTA positions.

The confusion over the meaning of "parent involvement" reflects the conflict of interest inherent in the governance structure of public education. On the one hand, school boards and teacher unions are supposed to protect the public interest in public education. On the other hand, in representing the interest of teachers, teacher unions frequently place the interests of teachers above the public interest. The information that the public needs sometimes turns out to be information that is critical of teachers or teacher unions. Inevitably, the union stake in promoting the interests of teachers overshadows its role as protector of the public interest; facilitating the expression of parent concerns and criticisms becomes subordinate to the union interest in protecting teachers. After all, teachers evaluate unions more on how well the unions protect teachers, not on how well they protect the public interest. As a result, although union rhetoric pays great deference to the parental stake in education, the interests of teachers and teacher unions, or what is assumed to

be in their interests, is predominant in practice.

The gap between union rhetoric and union practice with respect to parents is especially evident in union opposition to school choice. In virtually every field, citizens are better off if vendors must compete for their business; this conclusion is embodied in our antitrust laws. With almost 90 percent of the market, no one doubts that public (government provided) education is a monopoly or that the teacher unions are determined to keep it that way. The union arguments that this monopoly is good for parents and students is coming under widespread criticism, especially among inner city parents seeking alternatives to their public schools.

The self-serving nature of NEA/AFT opposition to parental choice of school is evident when we compare it to the NEA/AFT position on choice in the abortion context. When it comes to abortion rights, that is, women's freedom to abort, the teacher unions argue that (1) women should have the legal right, (2) the legal right will be useless unless women have the power, that is, the money, to pay for abortions; hence, (3) the teacher unions support government funding of abortions. "Freedom" is defined as the power to do something, not merely the absence of legal restraint.

The gap between union rhetoric and union practice with respect to parents is especially evident in union opposition to school choice.

When it comes to parental rights to educate their children, the teacher unions agree that parents should have the legal freedom to send their children to private schools; however, they insist that government must not provide the resources for parents to take this course of action. In the school context, the NEA/AFT contend that parents should be entitled only to the legal freedom to enroll their children in private schools; empowering parents to do this is unacceptable to the unions.

The union contention that parents are better off under a government monopoly is no longer taken seriously, except in the field of education. The contention is an effort to conceal the fact that teacher union interests are antithetical to parent interests on several basic issues. Not surprisingly, however, the teacher unions with revenues over one billion annually and thousands of highly paid employees, aided and abetted by a docile PTA, have prevailed over parents and the much more numerous but unorganized parent organizations. This state of affairs is

likely to continue as long as parents are not informed about the realities of teacher union/parent relations.

Even knowledgeable parents find it extremely difficult to achieve changes in teacher union contracts that disadvantage parents and students. To cite just one difficulty, the contracts are usually multiyear (2-5 years) in duration. During negotiations on a new contract, the school board and the union will object to a parent presence at the bargaining table. Furthermore, very few parents have access to the resources needed to monitor the bargaining process, and to bring pressure to bear on the parties to meet the needs of parents in the contract.

That is the bad news. The good news is that all parents can help their children learn more through parent involvement; however, the kinds of parent involvement that have this effect consist largely of day to day parent/child interactions and communications in the home. Constructive parent involvement includes such activities as:

- Reading together.
- Setting healthy daily routines.
- Monitoring amount and quality of television.
- Requiring completion of homework and household tasks.
- Encouraging high achievement and performance.
- Demonstrating positive values and character traits.

The union contention that parents are better off under a government monopoly is no longer taken seriously, except in the field of education.

The above list could be expanded and/or reworded, but the basic idea underlying parent involvement should now be clear. Some kinds of parent activity will lead to parent/teacher and/or parent/union conflict. Such activities constitute "parent involvement". Of course, it is desirable if parents and teachers function cooperatively, but parents should not accept the idea that "parent involvement" requires agreement or support for teacher or teacher union positions. After all, millions of parents educate their children at home every year, and the results are as good or better than can be expected from going to school. Parents may be right or wrong in their participation in school affairs, but they are involved either way. Finally, all parents can be constructively involved in the education of their children, and they can be despite union contracts that treat parents as interlopers in school affairs.

Chapter Endnotes

Chapter 1

[1] For a detailed analysis of NEA/AFT political influence, see Myron Lieberman, *The Teacher Unions* (New York: The Free Press, 1997), pp. 66-123.

[2] 1996-1998 Report of the Officers of the American Federation of Teachers, p. 56.

[3] Myron Lieberman, *The Teacher Unions* (New York: The Free Press, 1997), p. 158.

Chapter 2

[4] *National Education Association Handbook 1997-98* (Washington, DC: National Education Association, 1997), p. 243.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 244.

[6] "NCATE Reporter, "Standards, Indicators Focus of Fall Meetings," Winter 1997, p. 1.

[7] "Reforming Teacher Training & Recruitment," Dale Ballou and Michael Podgursky, *Government Union Review*, Vol. 17, No. 4.

[8] See Charlene K. Haar, *PTA: The Untold Story*, to be released in 1999.

[9] *National Education Association Handbook 1997-98*, p. 251.

[10] "The 1998-99 Resolutions of the National Education Association, as adopted by delegates to the NEA Representative Assembly, July 3-6, 1998," *NEA Today*, Vol. 17, No. 1, September 1998, Resolution B-1, p. 29.

[11] *Ibid.*, Resolution C-8 and C-9, pp. 33-34.

[12] *Ibid.*, Resolution C-19, p. 34.

[13] *Ibid.*, Resolution C-24, p. 34.

[14] *Ibid.*, Resolution C-27, p. 34.

[15] *Ibid.*, Resolution C-36, p. 35.

[16] *Ibid.*, Resolution B-8, p. 30.

[17] *Ibid.*, Resolution B-8, p. 30.

[18] *Reports of Committees 1997-98*, Presented to the 77th Representative Assembly of the National Education Association, July 3-6, 1998, p. 11.

[19] *1996 Proposed Convention Resolutions*, presented to the 74th convention of the American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO, Resolution No. 7, pp. 7-8.

[20] *Ibid.*, Resolution No. 75, p. 92, Resolution No. 74, p. 91, Resolution No. 47, p. 60.

[21] *Ibid.*, Resolution No. 49, p. 63.

[22] "The 1998-99 Resolutions of the National Education Association, as adopted by delegates to the NEA Representative Assembly, July 3-6," *NEA Today*, Vol. 17, No. 1, September 1998, Resolution F-46, p. 40.

[23] "Legislative Program for the 105th Congress," *NEA Handbook*, pp. 343-368.

[24] *Advancing NEA's Legislative Program, July 1998*, "II Professional Status and Personal Economic Security of Members," Item G: Working conditions and employment protection, p. 20.

[25] *Ibid.*, XVIII. Violence and School Safety, p. 15.

[26] *Ibid.*, I Children and Youth, Care and Development, p. 4.

[27] *Ibid.*,pp. 14-15.

[28] *Quality Public Schools Agenda, An agenda for the 105th Congress*, NEA, pp. 1-8; and *Advancing NEA's Legislative Program, July 1998*, pp. 4-5.

[29] *Advancing NEA's Legislative Program, July 1998*, pp. 3-4.

[30] Public Law 103-227, March 31, 1994, Short title: Goals 2000: Educate America Act.

[31] *Family, School, Community Partnerships*, Revised April 1996, in conjunction with NEA/CRUE Family-School-Community Partnership Cadre, p. 3.

[32] "Education Support Personnel Extra, Linking Home & School," *NEA Today*, vol. 17, No. 1, September 1998, p. 32A.

[33] *Parents as Partners 1993, Parental Involvement 1992*, The Learning Channel and the National Education Association.

[34] *The National Education Goals Report Summary* (Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel, 1997), p. 11.

[35] Helping Your Child Learn to Read, Helping Your Child Learn Math, Helping Your Child Learn Science, Helping Your Child Learn Responsible Behavior, Helping Your Child Succeed in School (all published in Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1993 and 1994).

Chapter 3

[36] The article is adapted from a model contract disseminated by the New Jersey Education Association. Some editorial changes were necessary to avoid confusion over references to other parts of the contract and to provide a simplified structure, but the content has not been changed in any substantive way.

Chapter 4

[37] See Charlene K. Haar, *PTA: The Untold Story*, to be released in 1999.

[38] From "Alphabetical Listing of Current Resolutions & Position Statements: Teacher Negotiations, Sanctions, and Strikes," IV.3B (PS), National PTA Position Statement, adopted by the board, 1968.

[39] Rose Marie Scott-Blair, "The Changing PTA: No More Tea & Cookies and—Maybe—No More 'T'," *Learning Magazine*, Vol. 6, No. 5, January 1978, p. 68.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 69.

[41] Charlene K. Haar, "The Teachers' Unions," *Crisis in Education*, February 1998, pp. 39-40.

[42] Myron Lieberman, *The Teacher Unions* (New York: The Free Press, 1997), p. 225.

[43] *Reports on Implementation of Actions of the 1993 Representative Assembly of the National Education Association*, July 3-6, 1994, p. 52.

[44] See Charlene K. Haar, *PTA: The Untold Story*, to be released in 1999.

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